

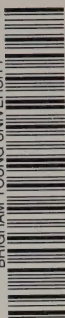


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# George Meredith

1909

*By J. M. BARRIE*



NEW YORK


WILLIAM EDWIN RUDGE

1924

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# George Meredith

*BOX HILL, MAY 22, 1909*

LL morning there had been a little gathering of people outside the gate. It was the day on which Mr. Meredith was to be, as they say, buried. He had been, as they say, cremated. The funeral coach came, and a very small thing was placed in it and covered with flowers. One plant of the wall-flower in the garden would have covered it. The coach, followed by a few others, took the road to

Dorking, where, in familiar phrase, the funeral was to be, and in a moment or two all seemed silent and deserted, the cottage, the garden, and Box Hill.

The cottage was not deserted, as They knew who now trooped into the round in front of it, their eyes on the closed door. They were the mighty company, his children, Lucy and Clara and Rhoda and Diana and Rose and old Mel and Roy Richmond and Adrian and Sir Willoughby and a hundred others, and they stood in line against the boxwood, waiting for him to come out. Each of his proud women carried a flower, and the hands of all



his men were ready for the salute.

In the room on the right, in an armchair which had been his home for years—to many the throne of letters in this country—sat an old man like one forgotten in an empty house. When the last sound of the coaches had passed away he moved in his chair. He wore gray clothes and a red tie, and his face was rarely beautiful, but the hair was white and the limbs were feeble, and the wonderful eyes dimmed, and he was hard of hearing. He moved in his chair, for something was happening to him, and it was this: old age was falling from him. This is what is meant by Death to such

as he, and the company awaiting knew. His eyes became again those of the eagle, and his hair was brown, and the lustiness of youth was in his frame, but still he wore the red tie. He rose, and not a moment did he remain within the house, for "golden lie the meadows, golden run the streams," and "the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts." He flung open the door, as They knew he would do who were awaiting him, and he stood there looking at them, a general reviewing his troops. They wore the pretty clothing in which he had loved to drape them; they were not sad like the mourn-

ers who had gone, but happy as the forget-me-nots and pansies at their feet and the lilac overhead, for they knew that this was his coronation day. Only one was airily in mourning, as knowing better than the others what fitted the occasion, the Countess de Saldar. He recognized her sense of the fitness of things with a smile and a bow. The men saluted, the women gave their flowers to Dahlia to give to him, so that she, being the most unhappy and therefore by him the most beloved, should have his last word, and he took their offerings and passed on. They did not go with him, these, his splen-

did progeny, the ladies of the future, they went their ways to tell the whole earth of the new world for women which he had been the first to foresee.

Without knowing why, for his work was done, he turned to the left, passing his famous cherry-blossom, and climbed between apple trees to a little house of two rooms, whence most of that noble company had sprung. It is the Chalet, where he worked, and good and brave men will forever bow proudly before it, but good and brave women will bow more proudly still. He went there only because he had gone so often, and



this time the door was locked; he did not know why nor care. He came swinging down the path, singing lustily, and calling to his dogs, his dogs of the present and the past; and they yelped with joy, for they knew they were once again to breast the hill with him.

He strode up the hill whirling his staff, for which he had no longer any other use. His hearing was again so acute that from far away on the Dorking road he could hear the rumbling of a coach. It had been disputed whether he should be buried in Westminster Abbey or in a quiet churchyard, and there came to him somehow a

knowledge (it was the last he ever knew of little things) that people had been at variance as to whether a casket of dust should be laid away in one hole or in another, and he flung back his head with the old glorious action, and laughed a laugh "broad as a thousand beeves at pasture."

Box Hill was no longer deserted. When a great man dies—and this was one of the greatest since Shakespeare—the immortals await him at the top of the nearest hill. He looked up and saw his peers. They were all young, like himself. He waved the staff in greeting. One, a mere stripling, "slight unspeak-

ably," R. L. S., detached himself from the others, crying gloriously, "Here's the fellow I have been telling you about!" and ran down the hill to be the first to take his Master's hand. In the meanwhile an empty coach was rolling on to Dorking.

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